

VZCZCXRO4621
PP RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #0836/01 2931311
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201311Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1919
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3598
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1493

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000836

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S PARLIAMENT DEBATES TURKEY-ARMENIA

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Garverick, Reasons
1.4 b and d.

11. (C) SUMMARY: In the first session of parliament in three weeks, MPs debated the recent signing of the protocols between Turkey and Armenia. Several opposition MPs criticized the recent anti-Turkish rhetoric used by the GOAJ, including the removal of Turkish flags from public parks. High-level officials from the ruling party fired back, stating the flags had been illegal and that the recent trip of 11 MPs to Turkey shows that they are working hard on this issue. Deputy Speaker Asgerov also used this opportunity to criticize the perceived inactivity of the Minsk Group and the United States on resolving Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Ruling party MP Seyidov also explained that Turkish leaders promised the Azerbaijani MPs on their trip to Turkey that the protocols would not be ratified without the liberation of Azerbaijani lands. Parliament is largely powerless to direct foreign policy, however, so these comments may be more for public consumption than an actual indicator of GOAJ policy. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION CRITICIZES ANTI-TURKISH EVENTS

12. (SBU) In the opening debate of the second plenary session of parliament, opposition MPs criticized a number of recent events which expressed anger at Turkey over the signing of the protocols with Armenia. Igbal Agazade of the Umid Party asked for a special session of parliament to discuss the issue, and said that the removal of Turkish flags from public places in Baku was not a good sign. He stated that the GOAJ should not allow other countries to ruin Azerbaijan's good relations with Turkey. Jamil Hasanli of the Popular Front Party stated that the GOAJ should not use anti-Turkish rhetoric, as Turkey helped Azerbaijan gain its independence. Sabir Rustamkhanli of the Civil Solidarity party agreed, stating Turkey was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence. He went on to criticize the last week's trip of 11 MPs to Turkey to discuss the protocols, calling them "a soccer team that cannot play."

RULING PARTY FIRES BACK (

13. (SBU) Deputy Speaker Bahar Murodova of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party then interrupted the list of speeches in order to fire back at these comments. She asked MPs to be polite in their speeches and said visits abroad are important. She asked the opposition not to pretend it cared more about NK than the ruling party does. She also stated that taking down the Turkish flags was not part of an

anti-Turkish campaign but was in order to comply with a law that states that foreign flags can only be flown in certain designated areas. She completed her speech by stating that Azerbaijan is allowed to sell its energy resources to whomever it wants, a clear reference to the much-publicized statement by President Aliyev at an October 16 Cabinet meeting where he was critical of the low prices Turkey pays for Azerbaijani gas.

(THEN ATTACKS INSK GROUP AND U.S. POLICY

14. (SBU) Another Deputy Speaker Ziyafat Asgerov agreed that the previous flying of Turkish flags was illegal, but then went on to criticize Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) decision to ban the Azerbaijan flag from the Turkey-Armenia soccer match in Bursa. Asgerov then switched gears to the Minsk Group, stating it has worked for 18 years without any result. He explained that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the signing of the Turkey Armenia protocols, but she has not come to Baku or Yerevan to solve NK. If she could force Turkey and Armenia to sign this agreement, why could she not force Armenia to withdraw from NK? He also asked why the Minsk Group co-chair countries attended the protocol signing, but then they announced that there was no link between Turkey-Armenia and NK. He concluded that the Minsk Group just comes and eats and spends money, and that Azerbaijan should put more pressure on the co-chairs. His speech was greeted with a spare spurt of applause from the chamber.

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MPs SAY TURKEY UNLIKELY TO RATIFY PROTOCOLS SOON

15. (SBU) Samad Seyidov of the ruling party then gave the chamber a summary of the 11 MPs' trip to Turkey. He said they were received at the highest level and had the opportunity to ask important questions and have forceful discussions. He stated that they met with the deputy head of Turkey's ruling AK Party who stated that the signing of the protocols does not mean they will be ratified. Such ratification would only bring problems for Turkey, and that ratification was impossible before the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Seyidov said these statements were echoed by the Speaker of Turkey's parliament, the head of its Foreign Relations Committee, and meetings with opposition parties in parliament. Seyidov explained that Turkey is trying to conduct balanced diplomacy, and with its Kurdish problem and balancing relations with Israel and Syria, Azerbaijan should understand that Turkey needs good neighborly relations. Seyidov concluded with Heydar Aliyev's famous expression that Turkey and Azerbaijan were really one nation with two states.

COMMENT

16. (C) The parliament in Azerbaijan has little power generally, and almost none in foreign relations. Therefore the views of these particular MPs are not likely to change the policy of the GOAJ. Rather, their statements reflect an ongoing debate within the government as to how to deal with Turkey post-protocol signing. President Aliyev has opened the door to veiled threats and other mild anti-Turkey rhetoric with public comments late last week, and these statements were echoed by the ruling party leadership in parliament. Still, the GOAJ thus far has been careful not to go too far in its attacks, knowing they need Turkey's support and have promises from all levels of the Turkish government that this support will continue. The criticism of Turkey here was more likely for public consumption, and an emotional response to the FIFA ban on Azerbaijani flags at the Bursa football match, rather than an indication of the GOAJ's policy direction. This seems evident, given that this

session of parliament was widely covered in the government
press, unlike most sessions of parliament.
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